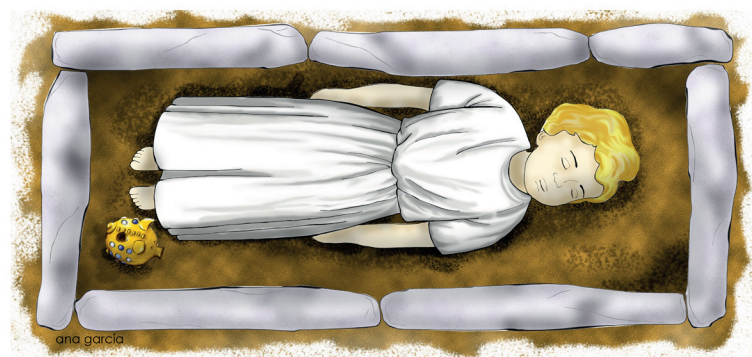
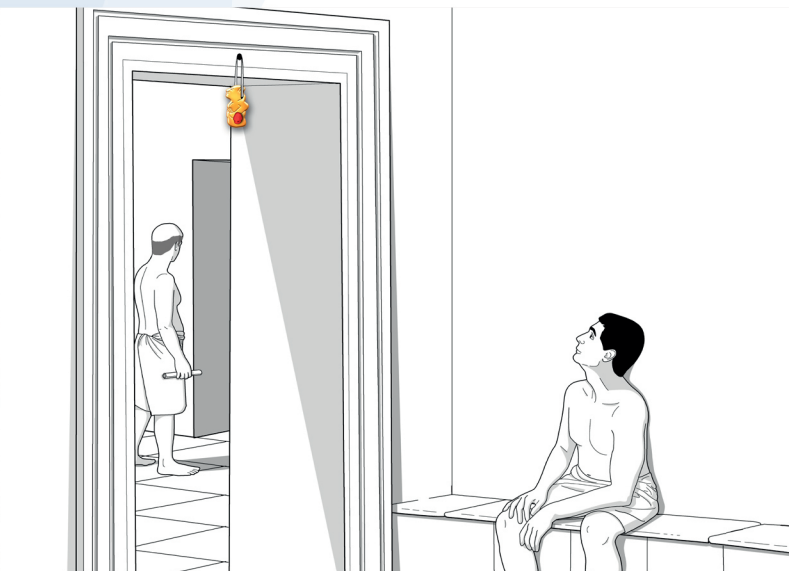


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## TERRACOTTAS FROM ROMAN OSTIA : SNAPSHOTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Their production and use in domestic, ritual and funerary contexts

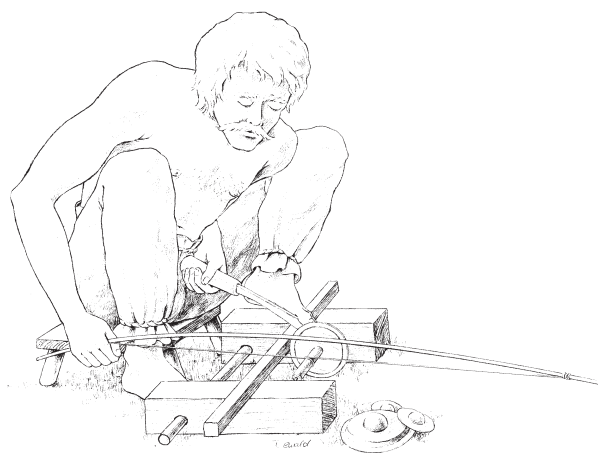
■ Elena Martelli

# **TERRACOTTAS FROM ROMAN OSTIA: SNAPSHOTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

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# Monographies Instrumentum

72



Collection dirigée par  
Michel Feugère

# TERRACOTTAS FROM ROMAN OSTIA: SNAPSHOTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Their production and use in domestic, ritual and funerary contexts

Elena Martelli

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**In memory of my father, Sergio**

***sit tibi terra levis***



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Needless to say, I am solely responsible for any mistakes or omissions that this work may contain.

# A BSTRACT

Roman Ostia, harbour of Rome, was the main collection point of goods with a multi-ethnic population. Previous studies have focussed mainly on buildings and valuable objects due to a well-rooted culture-historical approach. This work investigated the significance of 502 previously overlooked portable terracottas which, with their low economic value but highly symbolic meanings, provide key evidence about daily life in this vital Mediterranean centre.

A novel method, combining the Italian iconographical tradition with North-European theoretical and contextual approaches towards finds distribution and social identity, was employed to examine figurines (humans, deities, animals), ornamental and death masks, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic vessels and circular or beehive-shaped money boxes. Hemispherical moulds characterised by two interlocking halves impressed with theatrical and circus scenes were also investigated.

An initial contextual analysis of selected terracottas by category was carried out through a pioneering survey of the original, unpublished excavation journals. This yielded important contextual information. The research identified similarities and distinctive features for each group and investigated function, parallels and chronological frameworks.

A thematic approach was subsequently taken to explore broad topics, revealing new insights into clay objects production, circulation and consumption (religious, apotropaic and playful). Visual examination of the clay allowed for the identification of provenances, with significant implications for our understanding of trade in terracottas and cultural connections

with North Africa. Analyses of the craftsmen's stamps identified a close association between the local production of ceramic objects and lamps. Pilot experiments carried out on moulds generated original views about their use for making plaster casts, rather than cakes as previously thought. Anthropomorphic jugs with comic subjects were associated with wine consumption in baths and at the theatre. Private ritual practices and commercial transactions were identified by the occurrence of figurines and money boxes decorated with deities in the domestic/work sphere. Attitudes towards a *mors immatura* were revealed for the Imperial period through the identification in children's burials of recurrent patterns of finds such as death masks and figurines or pig-shaped toys transformed into sacrificial victims or beneficial guardians.

This work has highlighted the importance of previously neglected everyday objects for our comprehension of the Ostian society.

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## KEY WORDS

Isola Sacra - Ostia - necropolis - terracottas - clay figurines - moulds - anthropomorphic jugs - zoomorphic jugs - money boxes - masks - face pots - grotesque figurines - gladiators - charioteers - deities - animals - *genius cucullatus* - *anus ebria* - *Saecula* - moulds - funerary context - workshop - domestic context - kiln-theatre - stamps